London is less integrated than the rest of the country, a report finds

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Eric Kaufmann *reviews a report on social integration in Britain which finds that segregation on age, class and socio-economic lines is a serious and persistent fact of British society. Ethnic segregation is highest among the lower middle class and in London. The most isolated groups of all are not ethnic minorities, however, but the unemployed and elderly, which has important implications for the health and social alienation of both groups.*

The Social Integration Commission, chaired by Matthew Taylor, Director of the Royal Society of Arts, released its first report on June 30, entitled 'How integrated is modern Britain?'. Overall, the report shows Britons are a long way from being well-integrated along lines of age, class and ethnicity.

The Commission is an important body, chaired by a former Head of Tony Blair's policy unit, and includes leading figures from the policy, business and academic worlds. The work is based on a survey of around 4500 individuals which asked people about their most recent social gathering, then drilled down to enquire about the age, class and ethnicity of the people they socialised with. Creating an index of segregation for ages, classes and ethnic groups based on this, the report concludes that segregation on age, class and socioeconomic lines is a serious and persistent fact of British society.

As someone who is close to the data on ethnicity, I was interested to see what the authors would come up with in this area. Several surprising nuggets are contained in the report. First, ethnic segregation is highest within the C1C2 occupational category, i.e. the lower middle class. Second, those under 17 are more ethnically segregated than the 18-34s, probably reflecting the fact children live with parents in more homogeneous places than mobile twentysomethings. Third, ethnic segregation is slightly higher in London than in the rest of the country.

White Londoners are especially segregated from minorities as compared with whites in the rest of the country. This could reflect occupational segregation, however, inasmuch as there is a bigger occupational class gap between white and nonwhite Londoners than between whites and nonwhites elsewhere in the UK. Putting it all together, the authors show that lower-middle and working class London is strongly segregated by ethnicity as compared to managers and professionals on the one hand, and the unemployed on the other. This questions the conventional wisdom that immigrants and whites interact chiefly in the lower and middle rungs of society while wealthier whites are insulated from ethnic difference.

This comports with work Gareth Harris and I have done – to be released in a new report for Demos in July – which shows that the upper end of the working class and lower middle class segment of the White British population is the most opposed to immigration of all, and more likely than other strata to support anti-immigration parties like the BNP. It chimes with Gareth and my findings which show the non-university educated white working and middle class to be more likely to choose a whiter area to move to than a professional person of similar age, housing and marital status. This may also help explain the geography of UKIP support in London, which shows UKIP strength in white working class/lower middle class areas such as Bexley in South-East London, Hillingdon in the North West, and Chessington and Sutton in the South-West.

Exactly why the middle bands of the class structure, which contains around half the population, contain less ethnic interaction is unclear. One explanation mooted by social theorists is that this group has less of an achieved status than the professional class, and therefore invests more strongly in its ethnic identity. Meanwhile the unemployed have little choice but to interact with those stuck in their station, and are therefore more likely to experience trans-ethnic solidarity. In contrast, the working and lower middle class have both the motive and mobility to choose more

homogeneous settings, where they can realise a sense of ethnic community.

The most isolated groups of all are not ethnic minorities, however, but the unemployed and elderly: not a good sign in a society where the elderly are a growing share of the population and there is a persistent problem of long-term unemployment. This has important implications for the health and social alienation of both groups. Poor social integration could be an important factor behind the existence of a large pool of long-term unemployed people, a loss for them as well as employers who can't source the talent they need.

Clustering along lines of age, class or ethnicity, known as 'bonding social capital' can have positive effects in terms of information sharing, support and protection as well as the negative ones mentioned in the report. In the next stage of its deliberations, the Commission promises to canvas a wide range of academic literature to report on the social and fiscal costs and benefits of integration. Stay tuned for more from the Commission on this important and timely subject.

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Eric Kaufmann is Professor of Politics at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* (Profile 2010), *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America* (Harvard 2004), *The Orange Order* (Oxford 2007) and *Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland since 1945* – with H. Patterson (Manchester 2007). His current ESRC grant, affiliated with the think tank Demos, examines white working-class responses to diversity in the UK. His Demos report on the White British Response to Ethnic Change will be published in June. He may be found on twitter at @epkaufm.